

New State Food Rules Benefit Hyde County Restaurants and Patrons

Swan Quarter – Hyde County residents dining out at local restaurants may not notice the changes, but their dining experience may soon be a little safer thanks to changes in North Carolina's food safety code. The new rules are effective September 1.

"Our county health department staff works closely with local eating establishments to promote safe food handling practices," said Hyde County Public Health Director Wesley P. Smith. "These new rules allow us to keep up with changes in food preparation techniques, while keeping public health and safety in mind."

The new food code represents the most comprehensive change in North Carolina's food protection standards in more than 30 years and establishes practical, science-based rules and provisions to help avoid food-borne illnesses, like noroviruses and salmonella.

"Restaurant owners know that safe food is good business," said Larry Michael of the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services' Division of Public Health. "By working together to implement these changes, we can reduce our incidence of foodborne illness across the state."

Under the new rules, employees must avoid handling ready-to-eat food with their bare hands and all restaurants must have a certified food protection manager during hours of operation. Restaurant owners also must establish employee health policies to ensure that an ill employee who has the potential to contaminate food is not involved in the preparation or serving of food.

Restaurant rating systems also will change under the new food code. Although sanitation rating cards showing the grade and score will continue to be posted, restaurants will no longer earn a bonus for completing voluntary food safety training since certification will be required.

"Our inspectors have spent the last year learning the new rules and how to administer them," Smith said. "We have also worked with our local food provider community to help them make the transition to the new system."

Another change people will notice is that local food trucks and pushcarts will also be subject to the new food code rules and will be required to post a sanitation rating card.

Key Provisions of the new North Carolina Food Code:

- Each food establishment will be required to demonstrate knowledge of food protection by passing an American National Standards Institute (ANSI)-accredited exam. This requirement will be phased in and become effective January 1, 2014.

- Each food establishment will be required to develop and adhere to an Employee Health Policy to prevent and control the transmission of illnesses.
- Food establishments will be required to refrain from handling exposed, ready-to-eat foods with bare hands.
- Food establishments will be required to decrease the temperature of refrigerated foods and must date-mark opened, ready-to-eat foods.

Anyone interested in the new code can view it at: <http://ehs.ncpublichealth.com/rules.htm> or contact Hugh Watson, Environmental Health Programs Coordinator, at 252-926-4380.

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